Garbage Gazette

Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection

Volume 22, No. 6 **June/July, 2003**

School Recycling Inspections

During the 2002-2003 school year, thirteen schools were inspected in seven school districts. Two of the included schools are private. The public schools included: Brookfield High, Brookfield, Region 6 Wamogo Regional High in Litchfield, Hill House and Wilbur Cross High Schools in New Haven, Danbury High School, Bethel High School, Region 14's Woodbury Middle School and Nonnewaug High and the Center School, Litchfield Intermediate, and Litchfield High schools in Litchfield. The two private schools included CT Junior Republic and the Forman School, both in Litchfield.

Except for the public and private schools in Litchfield, it was the second inspection for the rest of the mentioned schools since the inspection program began four years ago. This year's inspections resulted in an increase in the number of Notices of Violation (NOV) from the Agency. Since the program began, the initial inspections have been viewed as technical assistance visits to remedy any deficiencies in school recycling programs. Schools understood that follow-up visits would be viewed more with an eye toward enforcement if necessary.

NOV's were issued to four schools: Brookfield High, Brookfield, Wilbur Cross High, New Haven, Danbury High School, Danbury, and Bethel High School, Bethel. Two of the Notices of Violation were based on complaints from faculty and administrators. Lack of bottle/can and white office paper recycling was the basis for most the violations. The schools have sent back their compliance statements outlining steps to be taken to correct the violations. Follow-up inspections are scheduled for the fall.

Public and private schools in the Town of Litchfield were inspected as a result of a request from the Litchfield Recycling Advisory Committee (RAC). Tyson Schoelzel, RAC Educational Liaison, worked with the schools to schedule appointments for DEP and organized a follow-up meeting with RAC and DEP staff. DEP staff found that the Litchfield schools are doing a good job of recycling, with a few minor problems. The two private schools, CT Junior Republic and the Forman School, will investigate the possibility of composting food waste since both schools are on large tracts of land.

Nonnewaug High School has a greatly improved program from DEP's first visit four years ago. Through student, parent, and teacher involvement, the school is composting as well as recycling the other mandated items. One teacher in particular, Dean Birdsall, has been instrumental in the improved program. Trying to upgrade the program through three principals over the last four years has been difficult, not to mention budget woes.

Correcting recycling deficiencies in the New Haven schools is more complicated and requires seeking out the right players from a number of different offices. Both Wilbur Cross and Hill House High Schools in New Haven were inspected at the request of faculty. Hill House High was issued a Notice of Violation for recycling deficiencies that required the input from several offices in the district. New Haven schools differ from other districts in that custodial services are contracted out to a private company under the Custodial/Grounds Department and pick-up is through the Department of Public Works. This means that a team approach outside the immediate school is necessary to remedy

problems, and while the principals should be involved, they are often out of the loop and leave the responsibilities of an in-tact program to personnel from the city DPW, the private contractor, and the district custodial/grounds office.

The biggest recycling challenges currently facing the schools are in the area of bottles and cans, electronics, and education and awareness. Bottles and cans seem to overwhelm maintenance staff at times. Beverages are a big problem with multiple vending machines dispensing beverages in glass, plastic, and aluminum. These items, especially in the high schools, often make their way to other areas in the schools such as classrooms where they are deposited in the class garbage bins. Schools are reluctant to have to put a third bin in classrooms especially when custodial staff is at a minimum in most schools. They don't have the time to maintain extra containers, nor the budget to provide bins in these classrooms. This is why it is so important to lay down ground rules for where beverages can be consumed and then maintain strict adherence to the policy through public awareness and education campaigns. Finally, schools are now grappling with electronic waste and the cost of disposal. Some schools are still throwing computer equipment in dumpsters to avoid paying disposal costs and for lack of other recycling alternatives. Many schools have voiced their frustration at the costs associated with recycling electronics in light of shrinking budgets.

The schools doing a better job of recycling often recruit a science or ecology club to help spread the word about recycling, but leadership must come from school administrators. Students and teachers come and go, thus the importance of an institutionalized school recycling policy and program. This is why DEP pursues a district-wide approach to recycling, working with district facility and business managers rather than a school-by-school approach. In financially trying times, DEP is working hard to provide the schools the technical assistance required to keep their recycling programs on board. If your school would like to request a visit to review your recycling program, please contact Frank Gagliardo at (860) 424-3130 or frank.p.gagliardo@po.state.ct.us.

Sneaker Collection Exceeds Goal

The spring collection of used athletic shoes, sponsored by the Connecticut Recyclers Coalition; the National Recycling Coalition and NIKE exceeded expectations. Working on a tight time frame and without a publicity budget, we were able to far exceed our commitment to NIKE of collecting 5,500 pairs. Our final count for the program was a total of 32 gaylords of shoes that contained a minimum of **6,400 pairs**! (We used an estimate for shoes per gaylord provided by NIKE.) Congratulations to everyone who participated in this unique program, especially the City of Middletown which accounted for over 3,500 pairs. These shoes will be recycled into athletic surfaces.

CT DEP Sponsors Second Annual Awards Program for Municipalities

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection is again sponsoring an awards program to recognize towns with outstanding recycling programs. All of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns have received a self-nomination form. Municipalities can nominate themselves, or can be nominated by another town or individual who is familiar with their program. In 2002, ten towns were awarded this honor at a ceremony held at DEP last December (See the December 2002 Gazette for details regarding the winning towns and their programs.) The deadline to receive nominations is August 15, 2003. The winning towns will be announced this Fall as part of our state's Connecticut Recycles Day celebration. If you would like to nominate a town or have questions about the form, please contact Judy Belaval at (860) 424-3365 or judy.belaval@po.state.ct.us or Meg Enkler at (860) 424-3238 or margaret.enkler@po.state.ct.us.